Redundo, R., Sparrow, P.R. and Hernández-Lechuga, G. (2019, in press) The effect of protean careers on talent retention: examining the relationship between protean career orientation, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and intention to quit in talented workers, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, in press

Abstract:

To study the effect of protean careers on talent retention, operationalized as the intention to quit, this study explores two pathways between protean career orientation and intention to quit: a direct pathway, and an indirect pathway via organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The study draws upon a sample of 306 talented workers selected from 17 Spanish and Mexican multinational organizations. Protean orientation should be expected to be widespread among talented individuals which might represent a threat to those that seek to develop and retain highly valued employees. We found that highly protean talented individuals show higher organizational commitment and higher job satisfaction, but contrary to expectations do not show a higher intention to quit. The total effect of protean career orientation on intention to quit is shown to not be significant because the positive direct effects are neutralized by negative indirect effects. The results help complement current knowledge of protean careers and a better understanding of organizational attitudes in the protean career context will help practitioners to show the importance of avoiding stereotyping talented employees based on a protean orientation as they do not comprise an extra risk for the organization in terms of commitment and turnover intention.

Key words: protean career; organizational commitment; job satisfaction; quit/turnover intention; talent retention.

Introduction

In an environment of increasing globalization, the changing but also often international nature of much employment, and significant technological changes, organizations face several challenges if they wish to gain a sustainable competitive advantage through the systematic management of human capital. Organizations have been paying growing attention to the identification, management and retention of those employees who are considered to provide the company with competitive advantage, and attention has shifted to the management of talented individuals who not only provide direct contributions, but who also coordinate and guide the actions of many others (Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin, & Taniguchi, 2009; Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010).

This has also required major career adjustments from many employees as well as changes in attitude. Employees are encouraged to take more control of their own career progress, and to derive benefits and satisfaction set by themselves rather than by their employer, leading to new career models (Baruch, 2006). More than a dozen "new" or "contemporary" career concepts (contrasted with traditional or organizational-directed ones) have been presented in the careers literature (Gubler, Arnold, & Coombs, 2014). Common to these new concepts is the assumption that individuals are, or should be, increasingly mobile and self-directed in their careers. Despite the multitude of concepts that have sought to explain contemporary careers, arguably, only two - the protean (Hall, 1996) and boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) career concepts - have become widely acknowledged.

In this paper we focus on the protean career, which is defined as a career path driven by the person, not the organization, based upon individual goals, that encompass the whole life space, as well as being driven by psychological success rather than more objective

success criteria such as pay, rank, or power (Hall, 2004). The protean career predominantly focuses on an individual's motives to follow a particular self-defined career path.

However, Gubler *et al*., (2014) argue there remains a lack of protean career studies that examine theoretically based variables to either predict the protean career, or important outcomes that it can lead to. In this study we examine intention to quit (ITQ) (which has also been called turnover intention). ITQ refers to an employee's intention to voluntarily leave an organization. Its use to study retention is justified on the basis that ITQ is a strong predictor of actual turnover (Tett & Meyer, 1993, Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

Some literature on protean careers suggests protean individuals have more negative attitudes to their current job and employer, and as a consequence are prone to greater mobility (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006; Hall, 2004; Sargent & Domberger, 2007), lower levels of loyalty (Zaleska & Menezes, 2007) and, accordingly, a higher intention to quit (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2014, Supeli & Creed, 2016). However, some other studies (Rodrigues, Guest, Oliveira & Alfes, 2015; Baruch, Wordsworth, Mills & Wright, 2016) do not confirm this pathway.

This study addresses this lack of consistency in the literature by focusing on the impact of protean career orientation (PCO) on intention to quit (ITQ). The study employs two methodological and analytical refinements to help clarify these mixed results. First, it argues that in studying any dynamics between PCO and important outcomes, it is important to understand whether the individuals concerned are also important or attractive to their organization. Our study concentrates and focuses only on "talented" employees (a status as operationalized by their organization). Previous studies have

used more general research populations, with samples being formed typically by managers or operative workers, but with no control for other variables that might allow for any sense as to the value of the employee to the organization, and the impact this might have on any observed relationship. In this study, however, we study a population that has been clearly assigned some kind of talent status. If we are to capture how the context of talent management impacts the way in which career behaviours work, we need to be studying this kind of populations. We are therefore adopting a contingency approach to talent. Gallardo et al (2013) state that any definition of talent must be adapted to an organization's needs, with any use of the term applied in a contingent way according to the organization's objectives. Each particular organization makes a contingent judgement to identify talented workers.

Second, we use the opportunity of using a single model that measures PCO and ITQ together with organizational commitment (OC) and job satisfaction (JS) to test not just for direct effects between our variables, but also for indirect effects. We develop arguments as to why there may be competing dynamics between variables once we examine both direct and indirect effects at the same time. We introduce two mediating factors of JS and OC to help unveil the complex relationship between PCO and ITQ.

There are sound reasons why it is important to include these mediating variables in our study. First, JS and OC are the two of the most analysed and strong theoretically based variables that act as generic antecedents of ITQ in the literature. Second, the literature has also signalled JS and OC to be relevant attitudes linked to protean career orientations. It makes sense therefore to include PCO, JS, OC and ITQ into a single model. And this leads to a third reason for our inclusion of JS and OC as mediators. So far the small number of empirical studies in the literature have been based broadly on

correlations of PCO and JS and, especially, correlations between PCO and OC. As such, the studies have produced mixed findings (the nature of these mixed results are detailed later in the paper as we specify our hypotheses). We argue that the PCO- OC- JS -ITQ pathway needs further clarification.

To better explain the effect of PCO on ITQ, we employ a theoretical framework based on Protean Career Theory (PCT) (Hall, 1996; Hall, 2004; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). We develop a structural turnover intention model in which two pathways between PCO and ITQ are derived: a direct quitting-stimulating pathway and an indirect (via OC and JS) retention-stimulating pathway and we test it on a sample of 306 "talented" workers from 17 multinational companies in Spain a Mexico. The evaluation of direct, indirect and total effects at the same time will give us a full picture of the relationship between PCO-ITQ.

Only a few studies have presented structural turnover models that include both OC and JS measures (Mathieu et al., 2016) and, to our knowledge, one other study (Supeli & Creed, 2016) has tested the relationships between PCO and the same attitudes, but this study only examined the direct impacts of PCO on each of them. Therefore, the design of our study builds upon the work of Supeli and Creed by additionally exploring indirect and total effects among the cited variables.

Our findings have important practical and theoretical implications. For practitioners the findings will surface some important dynamics of talent retention (intention to quit), for those individuals who have a protean career orientation. By examining the role played by two important job attitudes, organizations should be able to design HR policies and employment values propositions best suited to the purpose of retaining

talent. For academics, the study complements our current knowledge with a theoretical platform to enrich the discussion of protean career orientation.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The next section reviews the literature and develops our hypotheses. We then outline the variables and methods used in our data analyses, and the findings. Finally, we discuss the results, the theoretical and practical contributions of our study, and future research directions.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Turnover intention, organizational commitment and job satisfaction

Staff turnover can reduce organizational performance and is also costly through the need to cover replacement costs. Retention of those workers deemed to be talented is a priority for HR professionals (Mathieu et al., 2016). Organizations are encouraged to reduce the turnover of their talented employees to ensure productivity, quality, profit, competitive advantage and other related outcomes. We examine the issue of talent retention by looking at its obverse at the individual level – the intention to quit (ITQ) – amongst a sample of individuals that have been ascribed the status of being part of the pool of talented managers by their organization.

Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) defined OC as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization and characterized it by three factors: 1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; 2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and 3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. The concept of OC therefore refers to the desire and the willingness of an employee to

contribute to the success of an organization and implies loyalty to the organization and mobilization towards the development of its goals, purposes, and infrastructure, implies not only giving one's best to the organization, but also functions as a barrier to leaving the organization. Accordingly, meta-analytic studies (Tett & Meyer, 1993, Griffeth et al., 2000) have shown that OC is a strong predictor of intent to remain in the organization (Carmeli & Weisberg, 2006).

The second antecedent is JS. Locke (1976) defines JS as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 1300). Job satisfaction is comprised of cognitive and affective reactions to an employee's assessment of the amount of overlap between their expectations and the actual returns received from their current employment and an affective/emotional response by an employee concerning their particular job as to whether the employee likes the job (Carmeli & Weisberg, 2006). JS is among the most cited drivers of ITQ When an employee's attitude towards his/her job becomes more positive his/her intention to quit decreases. The early meta-analytic studies provided strong support for the relationship between JS and ITQ (Griffeth *et al*., 2000; Tett & Meyer, 1993) and studies continue to confirm the relationship (Baruch et al., 2016).

Consequently, we hypothesise the following:

H1: there is a direct and negative impact of OC on ITQ

H2: there is a direct and negative impact of JS on ITQ

The relationship of PCO to JS, OC and ITQ

Hall (1996) characterized a PCO as involving two attitudes: being values-driven; and being self-directed towards their career management. A values-driven attitude is seen

when individuals use their own values (values such as freedom and growth, professional commitment, and the attainment of psychological success, through the pursuit of meaningful work) as opposed to those of the organization to guide their career. A self-directed attitude is seen when the individual takes an independent role and internally develops their career and vocational behaviour (through a strong sense of identity and high adaptability to fit new situations). A protean career orientation requires that the individual is equipped with meta-competencies that help them manage self and career, and navigate and manage the challenges of such a career, such as high levels of self awareness, personal responsibility, autonomy and learning how to learn (Hall & Moss, 1998). Consequently, PCO individuals have the ability to change the form of their career orientation as the situation demands and exhibit both higher levels of mobility, and a learning orientation throughout their life in order to cope with constant changes (Gubler *et al*., 2014; Briscoe, *et al*. 2006; Sargent & Domberger, 2007; Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009).

Given that people with high PCO tend to be clear about their values and are self-directed this, in turn, makes them more able and willing to navigate towards a job and an organization they like (Rodrigues et al., 2015). Talented individuals have the additional advantage that they have differential skills, abilities, capacities and capabilities (Tarique & Schuler, 2010) that make them more "desired" by organizations. They are assumed by the organization to have the requisite meta-competencies to manage a PCO (Hall & Moss, 1998). Talented individuals who also have a PCO are more able to search for and choose organizations that provide them with a meaningful job.

OC and JS

Whilst it is widely agreed that JS and OC are two of the most important antecedents of ITQ, there is no agreement as to which antecedent is more important, nor indeed what the relationship between them is (Curry, Wakefield, Price, & Mueller, 1986; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Vandenberg & Lance, 1992; Mathieu et al., 2016). Accordingly, we will develop our hypothesis regarding the relation of JS and OC in the context of talent retention and new career styles.

From a behavioural commitment perspective "…the act of joining an organization and the conditions surrounding that act (e.g. whether a person joined when other employment opportunities were available) determines an individuals' attitudinal commitment to the organization" (Vandenberg & Lance, 1992, p. 154). We argue this commitment determines subsequent attitudes (Staw, 1980).

Accordingly, the literature implies that protean individuals who have also been ascribed the label of being "talented", can be assumed to be more likely to have chosen their organization from a likely larger number of attractive employment opportunities, and should develop a strong attitudinal commitment when they opt for a certain organization. This commitment triggers a process by which talented protean workers will rationalize that commitment, also developing a favourable attitude of satisfaction. Thus, commitment is a positive antecedent of satisfaction. We therefore hypothesise the following:

H3: there is a direct and positive impact of OC on JS amongst talented employees.

PCO and OC

There are different formal propositions about the relationship between PCO and OC that might be derived from within protean career theory. Summarising findings from the majority of the literature, Zaleska and Menezes (2007) argued that as PCO workers

pursue their personal aspirations and focus on developing and expressing their own values rather than prioritizing organizational values and outcomes, a PCO should be expected to have lower levels of loyalty and commitment to their organization. As such, there should be a negative relationship between PCO and OC (Supeli & Creed, 2016). However, the literature is still characterised by mixed results. For example, when Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009) explored this assumed relationship they found a null relationship. But Grimland et al. (2012), Rodrigues et al. (2015) and Baruch et al. (2016) found a positive link in their studies.

We believe that studying individuals who we know to be talented will help clarify these mixed results. We have argued that talented people with high PCO are more able to work for the organization they want. As such, just the selection of a certain company among other job alternatives in itself develops commitment to the organization. Therefore, the more protean an individual is, the wider choice of alternatives open to them, and the more likelihood that their choice comes with commitment. Furthermore, protean attitudes are based on inner values (Hall, 2004), and these are not necessarily in conflict with organizational ones. On the contrary, as noted by DiRenzo and Greenhaus, (2011), it is plausible that talented protean individuals experience higher levels of accordance between their values and the values of their organization, and find good fit between an organization and their identity, indirectly strengthening the individual's identification with the organization, and increasing their commitment.

So, we hypothesise the following:

H4: There is a direct and positive impact of PCO on OC amongst talented employees

PCO and JS

The most often researched correlate of PCO is subjective career success, and expressing one's values and optimizing one's satisfaction are core constructs within this orientation (Gubler *et al*., 2014; Supeli & Creed, 2016). Career success can be operationalized by variables such as job satisfaction, with studies predominantly finding a positive relationship between having a PCO and JS (Baruch & Quick, 2007). These results are not surprising, as having a PCO reflects being interested in psychological success, which means valuing growth and fulfilment rather than just pay, and as discussed before, being more likely to seek organizations that provide for this. The chosen organization is therefore functional in achieving work and individual goals, stimulating personal growth and development, facilitating learning and personal development, providing instrumental help or specific information for goal achievement, and inducing employees to meet their goals (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Employees derive fulfilment from what increases their satisfaction.

We therefore hypothesise that:

H5: There is a direct and positive impact of PCO on JS amongst talented employees

PCO and ITQ

Regarding ITQ, PCO individuals are purported to employ a broader whole-life perspective and learning-orientation, developing opportunities and/or continuous learning, and having a propensity for greater mobility (Briscoe *et al*. 2006; Hall, 2004; Sargent & Domberger, 2007). Previous studies have consistently shown positive associations between career advancement and willingness to change jobs, and ITQ (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009; Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2014, Supeli & Creed, 2016). We therefore hypothesise:

H6: there is a *direct* positive relation between PCO and ITQ amongst talented individuals.

However, our hypotheses development has also suggested there is reason to expect that a PCO can also have the opposite impact on ITQ, especially within a population of talented individuals, as these individuals are supposed to have higher levels of commitment and satisfaction and, therefore implicitly, a lower level of ITQ. We also expect there to be some negative indirect impacts of PCO on ITQ, enacted through OC and JS. In drawing attention to there being both direct and indirect pathways between PCO and ITQ, and that these pathways might work in contrasting ways, we therefore hypothesise:

H7: there is an indirect and negative relation between PCO and ITQ amongst talented individuals.

The conceptual model is graphically displayed in Figure 1.

<<Insert Figure 1 over here>>

Method

Sample and survey administration

To select organizations, we contacted a number of Spanish and Mexican institutions deeply involved with international business, such as the Mexican Embassy in Spain and Business Internationalization Institute from a University sited in Madrid. We selected nominated organizations against the following criteria: 1) operated in at least 2 different countries and 2) employed over 100 to guarantee the existence proper HRM policies. 32 of the nominated companies were invited to participate, and 17 accepted.

The judgement of being a talented worker is one made by their companies (Festing & Schaffer, 2014). Each company identified a senior HR manager as a sponsor to help with the study within their firm. Organizations were asked to identify their talented workers, at different levels in the organization.

The institutional arrangements that each participating firm might have to identify their talent pool was a matter for them, we just needed the affirmation that the participating individuals were, to our standardised definition - "those employees with a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities and personality characteristics that represent high performers and who are pivotal for the organization to the attainment of strategic goals" (Tarique & Schuler, 2010) - and the firm's selection, deemed to be part of the talent pool.

The data were collected from March 2015 to August 2015 using a structured questionnaire, e-mailed, posted or administered in the work place. A cover letter explaining the purpose and scope of the study accompanied the questionnaire. The letter included the invitation to participate in a study about "talent retention", the interest of the employee's organization in the study, as well as the confirmation of the participants' validity to be part of the study as they were informed that they had been selected as they belonged to a group of employees "highly valuable for the organization". We therefore assume that all participants would perceive that they were deemed by their organization as being potentially talented. Accordingly, response rate was high (over 70%). Anonymity and voluntary participation was also ensured. Finally, 306 questionnaires were usable for this study.

In the sample, 60% were male and 40% were female, from America (43%, mainly Mexico) and Europe (55% mainly Spain). 62% of them were married or lived with their

partners and the average age was 35.85 years. Regarding their education, 42% had university studies and 51% had postgraduate studies. Their tenure ranged from less than 3 years (45%) to more than 10 years (10%) and 44% had a directive position in the company. The organizations operate in the private sector, in the following industries: retailing (23%), services (22%), building (18%) and energy (12%).

Measures

Validated measures of all constructs were used. Responses to all items were obtained using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1= strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree". The questionnaire was analyzed by a panel of 7 individuals to make sure we avoided item ambiguity, unfamiliar terms, and vague concepts and kept questions simple, specific, and concise. They indicated all items were clear. We counterbalanced question order among the PCO and ITQ variables and did not intermix items of different constructs to avoid any "artefactual" increase of the inter-construct correlations to mitigate common method effects.

Protean career orientation (PCO) was measured with six items from Briscoe et al. (2006). Sample items are "Overall, I have a very independent, self-directed career" and "I am responsible for my success or failure in my career". Reliability was acceptable (alpha=0.68).

Organizational Commitment (OC) was measured using 3 items from Allen and Meyer (1990) measure of affective commitment (a sample item is "My organization has a big importance to me") and the additional item "I have a strong sense of affinity to the organization I work for".. Reliability for this scale was good (Cronbach's alpha=0.86).

Job Satisfaction (JS) was measured using 4 items from Bonache (2005). A sample item is "I am very satisfied with my job". Reliability for this scale was very good (Cronbach's alpha=0.90).

Intention to Quit (ITQ) was measured with 3 items from Sjöberg and Sverke (2000) as "I am actively looking for other jobs", with Cronbach's alpha=0.86.

Control Variables: The following personal information about participants was used as control variables (Rodrigues et al., 2015): age in years, gender (0 = men; 1 = women), marital status (0 = married; 1 = single), education (1= high school diploma; 2=higher education; 3=post-graduate education). In addition we controlled for nationality to account for possible cultural differences.

Analysis

We followed Conway and Lance (2010) to provide reasonable evidence our study does not suffer from serious problems of common method bias. The important sample selection status of being talented is based on an external assessment. Self-reports are appropriate for job satisfaction and our other "private event" measures of PCO and ITQ, though commitment might be assessed not just by the individual. We provide evidence of construct validity in the results section. Our constructs are clearly distinct both conceptually and in terms of their underlying factors reducing the risk attributable to common method variance. We took proactive design steps to mitigate threats of method effects by counterbalancing the order of questions; and avoided post hoc statistical control strategies as Conway and Lance (2010) do not recommend them.

The data were analysed with structural equation modelling (SEM) using AMOS version 20. To estimate and test our conceptual model we used the two-step method checking the measurement model and the structural model. We tested the mediated relationships and computed indirect and total effects. To ensure the significance of them, we used bootstrapping 95% confidence intervals using the bias corrected percentile method (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Results

Descriptive statistics

Mean, standard deviation, and correlations among constructs and control variables are shown in Table 1.

<<insert Table 1 over here>>

The highest mean is the one regarding PCO, near to 4 out of 5, which shows the extent to which a PCO has taken hold amongst talented employees. This is to be expected. In the same vein, the levels of JS and OC are also high, however, ITQ is significantly lower. So, in general, our sample of talented people is highly protean, committed and satisfied and does not have great intention to leave. Regarding control variables, age and marital status are the most strongly correlated variables, as being single is linked to younger workers. They also show significant correlations to job attitudes, especially to OC, indicating the young workers are less committed to the organization. The variables of gender, education and nationality generally did not show significant correlation with job attitudes.

Measurement model

Based on correlations in Table 1, previous to testing our measurement model, a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to determine the distinctiveness of the constructs OC, JS, ITQ and PCO were conducted. We compared the hypothesized four-construct measurement model (OC, JS, ITQ and PCO loading on different factors) with several alternative nested models in which several factors were set to load on a single factor. The four-factor model significantly fitted data better than the alternative models, supporting the 4 construct discriminant validity.

Although the χ^2 fit index was statistically significant the measurement model produced good fit ($\chi^2 = 223.290; df = 111; \chi^2/df = 2.012;$ GFI=0.923; IFI=0.958; TLI=0.948; CFI=0.957; RMSEA=0.058). The standardized regression weights (SRW) were all significant (p<0.000), ranging from 0.400-0.929, awarding the convergent validity of the scales (Table 2).

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Structural model

We ran the model adding control variables age, gender, marital status, and education, but only age had a significant impact on OC. Thus, we removed all the control variables (except for age related to OC) to have a more parsimonious model (Mathieu et al. 2016).

The structural model presented good goodness of fit ($\chi^2 = 256.697; df = 127; \chi^2/df = 2.021;$ GFI=0.913; IFI=0.952; TLI=0.941; CFI=0.951; RMSEA=0.058) and explained 66.5% of ITQ variance. Estimates are shown in Table 3 (standardized direct effects). The path PCO→JS was not significant, as the relationship between PCO and JS was fully mediated by OC. So, H5 is partially supported, since the impact of PCO on JS is positive, but indirect. In the same vein, the path OC→ITQ was not significant, as the

relationship was fully mediated by JS. Again, H1 is partially supported, since the impact of OC on ITQ is negative, but indirect. The direct effects of PCO on OC and ITQ were positive, supporting H4 and H6. The impact of OC on JS was also positive, although this one much more intense, supporting H3. As expected, JS has a negative and strong impact on ITQ, so H2 is held in our model. The impact of age on OC was positive, indicating that older people tend to be more committed.

We, then, calculate indirect and total effects (Table 3).

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All the standardized indirect effects were significant. The indirect impact of PCO on JS was positive and the indirect impact of PCO on ITQ was negative, but slightly inferior. Accordingly, H7 is supported. Again, as expected, the indirect effect of OC on ITQ was intense and negative.

Finally, all the total effects were significant, except for the one linking PCO and ITQ. PCO has positive total effect on OC and JS; OC has positive strong effect on JS and OC and JS have negative total effect on ITQ.

Discussion

Career structures, behaviours and attitudes have varied since organizations have been assumed to be the primary career driver. Protean career orientated individuals use their own values to guide their career, leading them to show higher mobility and to be learning-oriented (Gubler *et al*., 2014; Sargent & Domberger, 2007). In this context, it is important for organizations to better understand the role that a protean orientation plays regarding retention amongst talented employees, as turnover implies high costs

for the organization especially when it involves the loss of valuable employees who are difficult to replace.

There is some uncertainty about the extent to which independent career orientations are prevalent among employees (Clarke, 2013). Our first result shows that the protean orientation is quite widespread among talented individuals. This fact, a priori, poses a challenge to organizations, which seek to develop and retain highly valued employees. To shed light on this management challenge, we tested a structural model to explain the impact of PCO on ITQ mediated by OC and JS. We found confirmation of both a direct quitting-stimulating and an indirect (via OC and JS) retaining-stimulating pathways between PCO and ITQ. The two pathways working in opposing directions have similar intensity - what favours one is neutralized by the other - leading to a non-significant total effect of PCO on ITQ and to the main contribution of this paper, that consists of providing theoretical and empirical support to show that the risk to an organization of losing talented people with high PCO is not any greater than losing talented people with a low PCO.

As posited, the impact PCO on OC was positive in the same vein as results found by other authors (Grimland et al., 2012; Çakmak-Otluoğlu 2012). The rationale supporting this result lies in the nature of protean careers. Individuals with high PCO tend to be clear about their values and self-directed. This fact, jointly with the "war for talent", favours the election of an organization that better fits their interest and offers a meaningful job. From a behavioural commitment perspective, just the act of joining a particular organization versus another job alternative develops strong commitment to the organization. In fact, protean talented individuals might commit to the organization when they are evaluating different job alternatives and making comparison among them

(O'Reilly & Cadwell, 1981) as they perceive that the elected organization shares their values and presents a good fit with their identity. This strengthens the individual's identification with the organization and he/she feels more disposed to exert effort on behalf of that organization.

The direct effect of PCO on JS was non-significant. However, the *indirect*, and consequently, the total effect was highly significant and positive, as the relationship between the two concepts was fully mediated by OC. We can speculate how such a result - a PCO to OC to JS chain - might be explained. We can speculate that protean talented employees are more motivated to choose an organization that offers them a meaningful job i.e. they chose organizations that offer a good opportunity for acquiring the skills, knowledge, and job experience needed to pursue their future goals (Park & Jung, 2015). As such they become committed to the organization *before* their attitudes of satisfaction emerge. Then, as suggested elsewhere in the literature, satisfaction will be a result of fulfilment from that meaningful job (Hall & Las Heras, 2010; Baruch *et al*. 2016). In this sense, it could be that for talented workers, the more protean they are, the greater the possibility of them choosing the organization that provides them with a meaningful job (the more committed) and the more fulfilment (the more satisfaction) they reach. This positive total effect is consistent with our hypotheses, and the general position of the literature (Baruch & Quick, 2007).

Finally, we explored the relationship between PCO and ITQ. A significant positive *direct effect* was found between them, in line with most studies (e.g. Granrose & Bacilli, 2006; Supeli & Creed, 2016), which would support the proposition that a PCO individual develops opportunities and/or continuous learning and has greater mobility (Briscoe et al., 2006; Sargent & Domberger, 2007). In this sense, because they are

oriented to growth and development, even if they are happy in the organization they have opted, they are open to other possibilities that are even more fulfilling and/or help them maintain their employability.

However, most of those studies have not analysed the *indirect effect*, as we have here. Grounding in the protean career theory, we posited, and have empirically confirmed, a significant negative indirect (via OC and JS) effect linking the two variables, as found by Rodrigues et al. (2015).

Theoretical implications

Most of studies have not analysed indirect effects, and as such have failed to capture the complete picture of PCO-ITQ relationship. Grounding in protean career theory, contrary to the implicit belief that protean workers act as simple free agents not interested in establishing committed relationships and taking the first opportunity to leave (Briscoe and Finkelstein, 2009) we confirmed the finding of Rodrigues et al. (2015) that higher protean talented individuals in fact show higher commitment and, therefore, higher satisfaction, and it is this that indirectly makes them more willing to stay in the organization, compensating for their propensity for greater mobility and yielding a non-significant total effect of PCO on ITQ. In relation to H4, which argued that there should be a direct and positive impact of PCO on JS amongst talented employees, we found a non-significant direct effect of PCO, but a significant and positive *indirect* (and therefore total effect) between the two concepts that was fully mediated by OC. The two forces working in opposing directions have the same intensity, what favours one is neutralized by the other, leading to a non-significant total effect of PCO on ITQ.

The theoretical contribution for this is clear and the contribution to the HRM literature can be justified by returning to the original discussion of protean careers and its relation

to psychological contract theory. In the protean career contract, as initially outlined by Hall and Moss (1998) and embedded in the work of Rousseau (1995) on psychological contract theory, it is the person, not the organization, who manages exchanges of benefits and contributions, and their goal of internal (psychological) success results in a psychological contract with themselves, not with the organization. This contract results in greater emphasis on the shorter-term transactional exchanges, and (in line with the actions on the ground of organizations) less emphasis on the more relational exchanges. Although satisfaction with the organization overall and its broad actions may go down, job involvement and job satisfaction may yet increase (Stroh & Reilly, 1997) and result in maintained organizational commitment. For this to happen however (i.e. for the organization to prosper from an individual's job involvement and resultant commitment), we can speculate that, as suggested by psychological contract theory, in order for those with a protean career orientation to grow and derive fulfilment, the organization must still provide the necessary resources. It might therefore be assumed that those ascribed the status of being talented have indeed been afforded the necessary resources by their organizations, and it is this reinforcement that becomes the necessary condition for the proposed psychological dynamics to be evidenced.

Accordingly, the main contribution of this paper is to suggest theoretical explanation and empirical evidence to support that retaining high PCO talented individuals is not necessarily harder than retaining low PCO talented individuals, but is contingent upon the provision of the resources. Further, our structural retention model explains why and how this occurs: among talented workers, protean career orientation leads to a positive relationship with commitment (rather than reducing commitment, as is often assumed) and satisfaction, and this neutralizes the natural tendency of protean individual to have higher mobility.

Our findings provide new academic insights that augment current knowledge about the impact of protean careers on talent retention as they provide a better understanding of organizational attitudes in the protean career context. A protean orientation can be stereotyped as leading to lower commitment and a higher turnover intention, but in reality such a disposition does not comprise an extra risk for the organization this way. .

Practical implications

Our findings have important practical implications. They surface some important dynamics of talent retention (intention to quit), for those individuals who have a protean career orientation. By examining the role played by two important job attitudes, organizations should be able to design HR policies and employment values propositions best suited to the purpose of retaining talent. For academics, the study complements our current knowledge with a theoretical platform to enrich the discussion of protean career orientation. From the perspective of HRM, our findings should also prevent the stereotyping of talented employees based on a PCO. The study provides reassurance to managers who worry that more independent and protean talented employees comprise a risky investment in terms of commitment and turnover intention. Because they drive their own career path, they have higher possibilities of choosing the organization that best suits them, increasing their organizational commitment, their satisfaction and, indirectly, functioning as a barrier to leave the organization.

In order to take advantage of the pathways to foster retention, as suggested by Rodrigues et al. (2015) and Park and Jung (2015), among those talented with protean orientations, the policy challenge is to provide a balance of HR high involvement practices alongside organizational career management practices and encouragement for career self-management. HR high involvement practices must be devoted to boost their

commitment, but especially their satisfaction. Satisfaction is the last driver explaining turnover intention, indicating that, if protean talented workers do not derive fulfilment from their job, they will more likely leave the organization. Thus, high-performance work system plans and training opportunities (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) should all be expected to match their personal aspirations, to increase commitment and satisfaction and to reduce turnover intention. On the other hand, in order to combine organizational career management practices and encouragement for career self-management, organizations must provide talented protean individuals with flexibility to make them feel they are leading their own career as well as offer them vertical and lateral career opportunities to keep their employability and to fulfil their personal aspirations.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study shares the same limitations as others that employ cross-sectional designs, and although we have used statistical models that better tap causality, clearly longitudinal study would be needed to confirm the results. In the same vein, although we have provided evidence that our data do not suffer from any major common method problems, additional research must be conducted using data from different sources to confirm our results.

Additionally, our sample was comprised of talented workers selected by their organizations according to a contingency approach. We have been able to concentrate on a research population that we can reasonably assume are seen as being "talented" by their organization and have developed our hypotheses in the context of such talented workers. Whilst we can be confident that the pathway revealed is relevant to an employee segment deemed talented, despite using a common definition, there might be a lack of homogeneity in the actual selection of the participants across organizations.

One organization's operationalization of being "talented" can differ from another's. In order to reach more generalizable conclusions, further research is needed. It would be particularly useful to conduct a similar study within the boundaries of single organizations.

Whilst the study helps to reveal a set of theoretically supported psychological dynamics (by controlling for and examining only talented employees), it lacks a control group of untalented employees. It would be interesting to test whether or not our results are kept for non-talented workers. Future studies could test (within the same organization) whether the pathways we reveal also apply (or do not apply) to non- "talent population" employees.

There are two attitudes underlying the protean concept (as debated in Baruch, 2014). Now that we have evidenced that the status of being talented does appear to result in a contingent set of pathways, future studies might choose to elaborate on this and adopt alternative measures such as Baruch (2014) rather than the Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth (2006) measure.

Although many organizations do not inform their employees about talent management practices (Dries & Pepermans, 2009), in following ethical guidelines and the need for transparency and offering an open clarification and explanation of our study to employees, they would be aware of their designation by their employer of being "highly valuable for the organization". Employees who are members of a more favorable group (highly valuable) feel more committed, satisfied, and have lower turnover intentions, and this may have affected the intensity of the pathways (Gelens, Dries, Hofmans & Pepermans, 2013). This of course is part of the reason for the study – ascribed status (and the provision of additional resources this brings) we argue is

likely to affect the intensity of the psychological dynamics, hence the need to control for such status in studies. However, further study might be needed to check if results keep without informing workers of their status, although this would raise other ethical issues.

Finally, our sample was mainly comprised of Mexican and Spanish workers, so, our study was developed in Latin cultures. Cultural differences might influence the career attitudes and more collectivist cultures tend to place significant importance on connections to groups and communities and tend to ‘‘look to the existing group or organization for evidence of career success” (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; p. 26). In Latin cultures there is little concern for ‘others’ (people from outside the company) but much concern for ’us’ (people inside the company or close group members). Trust and good working relationships are appreciated and, sometimes, practices are paternalistic oriented (Valverde, Scullion & Ryan, 2013). This fact may make workers more inclined to be highly committed and satisfied what may have led to a higher intensity of the indirect pathway. This may vary for more individualistic cultures. Perhaps, this circumstance may contribute to explain the variation in the results of past studies conducted in different cultures. To seek replication of our findings in a broader and cross-cultural population, future studies should search for relevant individual differences and organizational variables that may help define the boundaries of the new career.

Conclusion

We have we applied a behavioural commitment perspective to explain theoretically the relationship between OC and JS in the context of talent retention and protean career orientations. The study shows that the positive impact of protean careers on JS occurs through OC and the negative impact of OC on ITQ occurs through JS, which is in turn,

the last driver in the path explaining turnover intentions of talented workers. The study suggests a double way of retaining protean talented employees, and this can help inform the design of HR policies. There is a retention-stimulating pathway that works via OC and JS. The development of HR policies that boost OC and especially JS, will help prevent quitting. However, at the same time there is a quitting-stimulating path. Policies that combine organizational career management (vertical and lateral career opportunities) and encourage career self-management, will help protean talented individuals keeping their employability and to fulfill their personal aspirations and therefore also serve to prevent them from leaving. Thus, our findings provide additional insights into the effect of protean careers on organizational variables. It shows that as the adaptable nature of protean careers results in mutual gains for employees and organizations (Rodrigues et al, 2015), retaining protean talented people must be a priority for organizations. In light of our results, the challenge for organizations to retain highly valued employees highly protean is not more difficult that to retain those with lower protean orientation levels.

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Table 1: Mean, standard deviation, and correlations among constructs and control variables.

			Correlations							
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 PCO	3.988	0.569	(0.68)							
2 OC	3.719	0.942	0.214**	(0.86)						
3 JS	3.927	0.919	0.131*	0.664**	(0.90)					
4 ITQ	2.160	1.160	0.098	-0.493**	-0.691**	(0.86)				
5 Age	35.846	9.335	0.054	0.292**	0.246**	-0.152**				
6 Gender (female)	0.399	0.490	0.056	-0.090	-0.070	0.029	-0.167**			
7 Marital status (single)	0.376	0.485	-0.046	-0.210**	-0.203**	0.129*	-0.366**	0.112*		
8 Education	2.458	0.606	0.036	0.086	0.037	-0.013	0.080	0.046	0.027	
9 Nationality (Europe)	0.552	0.498	-0.092	-0.079	-0.139*	0.095	-0.070	0.089	0.115*	0.301**

*,** statistically significant at the 5% and 1% levels respectively

Table 2: Standardized regression weights (CFA)

			Estimate
PCO.1	<---	PCO	0.400
PCO.2	<---	PCO	0.548
PCO.3	<---	PCO	0.639
PCO.4	<---	PCO	0.467
PCO.5	<---	PCO	0.545
PCO.6	<---	PCO	0.413
OC.1	<---	OC	0.797
OC.2	<---	OC	0.929
OC.3	<---	OC	0.572
OC.4	<---	OC	0.743
JS.1	<---	JS	0.775
JS.2	<---	JS	0.874
JS.3	<---	JS	0.842
JS.4	<---	JS	0.862
ITQ.1	<---	ITQ	0.863
ITQ.2	<---	ITQ	0.789
ITQ.3	<---	ITQ	0.823

Table 3: Standardized direct, indirect and total effects (shadowed, non-significant). In brackets, 95% confidence interval.

	Standardized Direct Effects			**Standardized Indirect Effects**			**Standardized Total Effects**		
	PCO	OC	JS	PCO	OC	JS	PCO	OC	JS
--> OC	0.245 (0.056, 0.379)						0.245 (0.056, 0.379)		
--> JS	-0.007 (-0.117, 0.100)	0.797 (0.731, 0.859)		0.195 (0.044, 0.323)			0.187 (0.052, 0.326)	0.797 (0.731, 0.859)	
--> ITQ	0.250 (0.128, 0.370)	-0.082 (-0.268, 0.073)	-0.764 (-0.921, -0.608)	-0.163 (-0.301, -0.054)	-0.609 (-0.754, -0.479)		0.086 (-0.093, 0.248)	-0.691 (-0.777, -0.593)	-0.764 (-0.921, -0.6